

STATEMENT REGARDING IRREGULAR PROCEDURES IN ADOPTION¹

PARENTS: Suzanne McGrath and Brian Jenkins

CHILD: 1963², Queen Victoria Hospital, Melbourne.

ADOPTIVE PROCESS: Initiated, and executed by St Anthony's Home, Croydon, N.S.W.,
approximately April–May 1964

General statement of circumstances

1. My first pregnancy was spent with the father of my child under constant threat and occasional periods of intense harassment.
2. My right to live with the father of my child before I turned eighteen on 8.8.63 was continually questioned.
3. My relationship with Brian Jenkins had begun the previous year, when I was studying at the University of Sydney.
4. The adoption of _____ had nothing to do with my rights and interests or _____ rights and interests. It took place in an era when Catholic parents and the Catholic Church would do almost anything to prevent relationships between a Catholic and a person of no specific religion, and when the University and intellectuals as a whole were seen as evil.
5. It took a long time for my identity to be broken to the point where an adoption could appear, legally, to have taken place. The events were so bizarre and often above the law that I think, when it finally happened, I know (*sic*) longer knew what was real, moral or legal.
6. For these reasons, I have set out what I recall of the chain of circumstances, in some detail, as they do not conform to what we expect of Australian citizens in positions of responsibility.
7. I have, myself, reached the point, and my daughter the age where I am willing to open any legal procedure which will rectify some of the damage, and certainly discourage people of particular persuasion not to feel they have a God-given authority to ignore our State and Commonwealth laws in the interests of transferring children to sections of the society who meet with their favour.
8. In this statement, I make a lot of reference to my parents. It was a situation which they found painful and difficult to accept. The family bitterness resulting from this has never really been resolved. Part of the tragedy is that my father died two years ago³ with this bitterness still between us. Yet, I think, they were also victims, in that allegedly professional people to whom they turned for guidance actually fostered a Calabrian fantasy which proved very destructive to all of us.

Details of irregularities

9. I discovered I was pregnant to Brian Jenkins in approximately March, 1963. He was the only man in my life and, although he was not keen to marry me, he wanted to live with me and we planned to try and make a go of things.
10. Knowing the conservative attitudes of Catholic families of the time, who often put their daughters in institutions when pregnant, we were very secretive about our plans. I was not eighteen until the coming August, and of course, in those days, a minor until twenty-one. We arranged that I stay with him and

friends secretly in Sydney. I sent a note to my parents, and generally avoided people for a while. Brian was working, and we decided it would be more sensible to go to Melbourne for the birth.

11. I am confused about exact details. I know, through the introduction of other friends, I stayed briefly with the people who were eventually godparents. I was not yet obviously pregnant. We must have travelled separately. He joined me and we stayed elsewhere while house-hunting. I remember telephoning my mother from Bourke Street Post Office as they had not written to me (I think). I remember my mother was so abusive, it is the only time in my life that I fainted. (I was with Brian at the time.)
12. I think my father must have contacted me. I know I went to meet him, saying I would be home with the bacon for lunch. My father took me to Sydney. I was taken to doctors who confirmed my pregnancy, and informed my mother (as I said I was returning to Melbourne) that I was some sort of intractable. Apparently he was the sort of doctor) used by St Margaret's Hospital. In any case, my loyalty to my child's father was seen as evidence of immorality. I returned to Melbourne, although I don't recall any details. The exact sequence of events is confused here.
13. In June or July, when we were living in South Yarra, I opened the door one morning to two policewomen. They had come to arrest me. Brian thought they were arresting him, and disappeared. I went with them to Russell Street Police Station, where my father was waiting. I was given a choice. If I were charged with vagrancy (which, they agreed, would not be provable), I would be sent in custody to New South Wales. The alternative was to go to New South Wales with my father. I did this.
14. On arrival at Sydney Airport, we were met by a priest, (? now in Perth ?), a friend of a friend of my mother's, As , she taught in a Catholic school at Paddington. Her husband was in Social Services. They were extremely anti-intellectual and involved themselves in amateur social work.
15. I recall the priest driving my father's car to St Anthony's. I felt sorry for my father as these people were destroying his self-respect as well as mine.
16. At the Home, I met a nun who wanted me to agree to stay the night there. We were all exhausted. I resisted her invitation to a soothing injection, and then argument centred on a semantic debate on whether I could know what I knew, to want what I wanted, etc. I agreed to stay, and asked to use the telephone. I rang a number, and heard the nun breathing on the extension line. To my own amazement, I was able to leave while she listened to the phone ringing.
17. Fortunately, I am not a criminal (nor was that criminal), nor a tart, and I found all this acutely stressful. At the same time, I knew they were, ultimately, after my baby, and so I kept a cool head and walked (I had no money on me) to some friend. I hid in Sydney, then, having contacted Brian, arranged transport back to Melbourne.
18. The police came another time. I was just short of eighteen, and they were not taking the matter too seriously. However, we were afraid that Brian would be charged with corrupting my morals. I made a statement, making reference to a prior relationship to protect Brian. I was asked personal questions about my life. I believe from a disconnected page from a letter from my mother, that this document was shown to my father and the file destroyed. Perhaps it is still there. Anyway, it must have hurt my father terribly, as well as removing any grounds for further harassment. Perhaps that influenced their later prejudices. I don't know.

19. My parents visited me one more time. We bought a carpet to try and impress them, but they would not come in. I had lunch with them.
20. In fact, I suffered from terrible nightmares from the time I was taken to Sydney—about my father, and about attempts to take my child.
21. was born in October. I was treated at the hospital as , and it was all quite normal. I avoided anything which might lead to pressure for adoption, including pretending my parents were dead on the admission form—which may affect tracing it. I needn't have bothered, as a friend informed my mother, who came to visit us.
22. For at least three months after was , my parents pretended to accept her, bought gifts, clothing, etc., and generally made me feel more secure. My father still would not speak to Brian, but I hoped to overcome that. According to all the textbooks, even the most rejecting people respond to their own flesh and blood.
23. During these months in Melbourne, I was experiencing all the pleasure and difficulties of a new mother. I had had a difficult forceps delivery, which may have triggered off breastfeeding problems. gained weight, but gradually. She was a bit vomity, which I now know is quite normal, although it was used to insinuate my incompetence later. What happened (*sic*) was that she was very wakeful. I had spent extra time in hospital to establish a feeding routine, but was unable to continue breastfeeding beyond six to eight weeks. I switched to bottle feeding, but felt very guilty about this. In fact, she continued the vomiting. In retrospect, I think I felt so responsible for her, I simply spoilt her a lot. I don't mind this—they are the precious moments of one's life. But I became pretty exhausted.
24. Before was born, I had done some teaching at Taylor's Coaching College. With the maternity allowance, I gave Brian the deposit for a car so that we could drive to Sydney for Christmas. It is obvious that I had no intention of leaving him. I was, however, anxious for my baby, and looking forward to some moral support after all this conflict. Brian loved both of us, but he wasn't very helpful on nursing problems, and a bit insensitive to my fussing.
25. In December, 1963, Brian, and I drove to Sydney. We stayed at the house of friends, some young lawyers, of whom some were, like us, visiting family for Christmas. We visited uncle and grandparents at Kemp's Creek, various friends, and I visited my family with her on Christmas Day. After all the difficulties of life in Melbourne, I wanted very much to return to Sydney. In January, Brian returned to finalise our affairs in Melbourne. He decided I should stay with my parents to offset expenses. This was an unrealistic decision, as events proved, although there was also a hope that it might cement all the new relationships.
26. Once Brian was gone, and we were staying with my family, they renewed pressures for me to leave Brian. There was no mention of any other separation (I mean from my daughter). My mother was, in fact, helpful, and allowed me to catch up on some rest. I took her to a doctor, a at Paddington, who, I was told, would check her weight. He did this by standing on the scales, and then holding the baby. I really failed to see the lack of serious intent towards my daughter's health. I had sleeping problems. I had telephoned Brian asking (*sic*) him to take some action (preferably marital), and was back in the emotional tug-of-war. suggested I should go to hospital for further rest, blood counts, and so on. I was prescribed sleeping tablets.
27. I spent some days in the Eastern Suburbs Hospital, where I received no treatment apart from a visit from , who was an anaesthetist there, which seemed more social than otherwise. In fact, I

was quite healthy, but any crying on [redacted] part was being attributed to my 'inability to cope', and a situation [was] created in which I began to feel events were no longer under my control.

28. Misunderstanding between Brian and I increased. I was under frightful pressure, and adoption was mentioned. I don't think he realised the situation at all, as will become clear. I certainly wish he had done something to clarify the situation at the time. He appears to have thought that I had already committed myself to a line of action before this took place⁵. I believe he became extremely depressed. He was still in Melbourne.
29. My parents suggested that I stay with them at this time and enrol again at University. I had passed two first-year subjects there in 1962, and it seemed sensible to continue to get a qualification. As there was obviously a rift between Brian and myself, my mother offered on my father's part to help me find a place to live and resume a course, eventually to support [redacted] myself. I was now in a state of total confusion about how, where, etc. we were to organise ourselves. I had no financial independence, I appeared to be drifting into a separation, and I was finding it difficult to get work. My previous experience had been full-time student in 1962, and clerical work at the Medical Benefits Fund in 1963 before leaving Sydney. In Melbourne, I had worked at Taylor's coaching college. All this was fragmented work experience, and I was experiencing the difficulties of waiting for Brian to do something positive, finding a waitressing or anything job for money, perhaps resuming some course if sole support was to rest with me.
30. Although, in retrospect, and having seen my sister-in-law experience exactly the same pattern of birth and feeding problems (solved by an allergy-free diet) I now realise there was absolutely nothing wrong with myself or my daughter, or my mothering (she was, of course, clean and well-dressed—and to the point where people commented on how well-cared-for she really was), I began to feel guilty and responsible for every hiccup and so on. It was repeatedly suggested that I was transferring nervousness to her, and that I should not hold her after feeds, and so on. It was then suggested that I take advantage of the Karitane type facilities at St Anthony's.
31. It may seem extraordinary that I trusted these people. I think I wanted to believe that there was someone to trust and depend on. I think I was also under enough pressure to be on the verge of a breakdown. I used to cry a lot, and had become, under the advice of a doctor and for the only time in my life, dependant (*sic*) on sleeping tablets. At no time did I see a trained social worker, or have any kind of advice as to my rights and entitlements. It is only since that I have heard of fostering arrangements, live-in housekeeper arrangements, or even unemployment benefits.
32. On booking [redacted] in to this nursery situation, as I thought, I promised that my father would pay for her—although she was hardly at an expensive stage of life. I was so naive, (*sic*) I took masses of clothes and nappies for her. It was only when I visited her, and saw her dressed in some other child's outsize clothes that I realised she was being treated as a child in an institution. I asked the nursery sister about her clothes, but apparently this was seen as an enquiry about my generous donation. I had no objection to [redacted] clothes being borrowed, I suppose, but they were all part of our identity.
33. On visits, I began to be asked for money. My father now began to refuse any assistance. There was no word from Brian that I received. I spent time trying to find work. I visited some organisation about housekeeping (there was nothing available) and generally sought work in a haphazard manner, trying to sort out hours and housing which would enable me to take care of [redacted]. I did not know about creches and the like. Everywhere, I was told I was an unusual applicant—too middle class, I suppose. It all reinforced my feeling of inadequacy financially.

34. Meantime, the nun at St Anthony's became openly hostile and aggressive. I was abused for visiting my daughter in slacks. I was sneered at when I explained her name was Welsh. Finally, I was presented with a questionnaire about our physical background which included questions about our (Brian's and my) physical appearance. It became clear that I was being treated as a surrogate mother to be dispensed with as soon as possible. Income, and the concept of income tested motherhood was also introduced. Her baptism in Melbourne was also a critical issue. (was baptised as , her god-parent ⁶, (*sic*) now a lecturer at Duntroon, and her husband, .) It was decided that this baptism made a Catholic, and the nun felt it her duty to remove her to a proper Catholic environment. Brian and I were intellectuals and therefore soul had to be rescued from us. I was treated now as an object of total scorn.
35. I can only say that by this time I was stunned and confused. I had thought my wishes and commitment to my child had been made over and over in the past twelve months. There seemed to be an amorphous sort of conspiracy going on, in which any avenue ended up with pressure to take my child from me. She had two parents—but that had been muddled and meddled with. Brian's rights were never considered. I was reduced from a tired and anxious mother to an incompetent fool. Yet I continued to believe that there was some difficulty in perceiving my point of view, and that, without money or other resources, there must be some action I could take which would communicate that. At this point, I agree, I was not thinking rationally. I think I desperately wanted to believe that there was someone we could trust, who was not hard-hearted and utterly cynical about mothers and babies, and find some way of reaching them.
36. My mother, on the other hand, kept presenting the argument that there were changes in regulations which meant I would never lose contact with . If I signed the authority for her to be cared for by a Catholic family, I would be kept at a distance but would have regular photographs and information on her progress. It is hard to prove any conspiracy of deceit here, but I was sent one group of photographs which certainly delayed my enquiries for further information until I could be safely told the true arrangement—when it was too late to do anything.
37. This was later. It is difficult to present the true sequence when events were crammed into a few months which I have gone over and over for twenty years. Brian, for example, was only out of contact for six to eight weeks. Yet the pressure I was under made this feel like desertion. The nun also introduced time pressure. She claimed was becoming institutionalised. If smiled at me, she claimed smiled at everyone. This may have been true, but it was also aimed at undermining our relationship—and further demoralising me. She was really concerned with adoptability. She was such a beautiful baby.
38. As a desperate move to stop the pressure, I allowed myself to be taken to St Anthony's. I signed some papers. They were prepared, organised and witnessed by the adoptive nun. Her name, I think, was . There were no independent witnesses (her usual name was Sister A...? which may have made her appear the witness, I don't know). I was informed of nothing. I was given no copy of the papers. I was not told of any period in which I could revoke or challenge them. I had no real ideas left. That day or so, I took an overdose of sleeping tablets. I thought this would have some legal effect , and bring me into contact with some practical help—a social worker, perhaps. Anything.
39. Again, there was no predictable response. The overdose should have taken me to the Royal North Shore Hospital. Apparently my mother convinced the ambulance driver to take me to the Mater Misericordiae Hospital—a Catholic institution with no intention of enabling me to criticise another. There must be

records of this. It must be perfectly clear that the Royal North Shore Hospital is much closer to 43 Sharland Avenue, Chatswood than the Mater. My mother was a pretty and very determined woman.

40. While I was in hospital, the papers I had signed were cancelled. I spent a week resting. I stayed until I was discharged by the resident doctor. I saw a psychiatrist appointed by the hospital. I explained my situation. They brought a priest to see me, friends, etc. Mostly I was sort of left to become worried and anxious again.
41. I returned to my father's home. About this time, or perhaps earlier, a priest from Chatswood Parish Church arrived and performed some version of exorcism on me. I remember sitting on the lounge in my dressing gown in amazement.
42. I discovered that, like all good Catholics, my father had no respect for potential suicides. I went to St Anthony's. There I was abused for having severely upset some potential substitute parents. The whole thing began again.
43. At last, I could not cope. I only remember one thing about the extraction of my signature in the end, and that I was screaming and screaming in the hope that some other mother in the Home might hear and have the sense to run away. This behaviour was considered very weak indeed.
44. A few weeks later, as I tried dimly to function, I was in Mitchell Library. I was in a stupor of depression. I would sometimes go to University, which was like a substitute for a home, but become too obviously depressed to stay. I was wandering about, and visited the psychiatrist at St Leonards. He informed me that I was unstable to have ever been in the Mater Hospital, unstable on signing the papers, and probably unstable for ever. With all this behind me, I was sitting in Mitchell, when Brian appeared. A mutual friend had written to him of what was happening in Sydney. He had visited the Catholic Welfare representative, _____, who had told him of a thirty day period before an adoption becomes final. We made an appointment to see her. Brian came to see a priest with a view to getting married. We went to see _____ to discover that we were a day or two too late to save our baby. This was May, 1964.
45. That year I saw a succession of lawyers, all of whom cited the Joan Murray case as a legal precedent. No-one seemed to take into account the bonding between _____ and I which had taken place over six months already, the fact that she had been born, loved and cared for under such different circumstances.
46. My relationship with Brian could not survive all this trauma. Recriminations were mutual. I could not bear to live in Sydney, and took a job teaching in Wollongong. It is surprising the way I was treated as a competent employable person after the event based on my alleged incompetence and instability. The photograph game came and went. All enquiries addressed to St Anthony's were treated with disdain. The nun in charge is said to have acknowledged that she made a mistake. She refused to see me in a telephone conversation as recently as 1974⁸.
47. I did have the resources to mother my daughter, but not to conduct a Supreme Court action. It was on that income basis that she has been considered to be legally adopted. I doubt if any of this conforms with Australian law.